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## THE NATURE AND USE OF BEAUTY.

### CHAPTER IV.

#### CONFIRMATION OF THE THEORY OF THE DIVINITY OF BEAUTY.

BEFORE proceeding to the examination of the authorities on the philosophy of Beauty, we wish to meet, and dispose of, any objection which may be made to our theory on the ground of mysticism or transcendentalism. We admit that it is transcendental so far as to transcend the limits apparently fixed by the schools, and even the bounds of ordinary investigation, which seem to terminate, by general consent, at sensations, not deeming it possible to pass behind a primal feeling to the examination of the cause of feeling itself; but if, in being so transcendental, it appears mystical, we believe it will be from want of sufficient intensity of thought, or from false ideas of the nature of the relation between spirit and matter—the real and the actual. Yet, if we will take the trouble to examine our slightest thoughts, or sensations, other than physical, we shall perceive that matter, with all its actuality, never conveys to us an impression of a reality—a thing which holds a true and interminable existence, but in all its forms perpetually proclaims its own decay and change, and its obedience to a law which has its force from the spiritual life of the universe; we shall acknowledge, in spite of all our reasonings to the contrary, that they are only the qualities which act through matter which influence our minds—that the inert, lifeless forms of things in the material world are capable neither of giving or receiving impressions—but that if we receive any by them, we recognize therein, not the thing organized, but that inner something which organizes, which perhaps we take no pains to examine, but which we have an apprehension of, in some way, as a mysterious power, giving shape and substantial being to everything which we attribute individuality to. Of the sand beneath our feet we take no heed—there is no element of interest in it; but let us take up a single crystal of the myriads that compose it, and regard its structure, and the instant that we become conscious of obedience in it, testifying to a law-giving spirit acting or residing in it, it becomes worthy of a senti-

ment and emotion towards it: and in the just proportion in which this spirit is perceived, will be the depth of the sentiment and the force of the emotion. If, then, we must admit the presence of a spirit in Nature, why not also admit that the characters in which that spirit writes its proclamations on the whole outspread universe are legible by our spiritual understandings? Let our acceptation of that spirit be what it may, so far as it is acknowledged as an Intelligence, it is what we know as God; and, be it the Hindoo, the Greek, or the Hebrew acceptation of Him, it is still the Governor of the universe, whom each man receives according to his capability of comprehending Him, as the origin at once of the life of Nature and of the divine in us. We do not care to define God—that is the province of Theology—nor do we care even to demonstrate with mathematical positiveness the theory we hold of the manifestation of God in matter; to coerce the reason into acquiescence with our positions, by the weight of argument, were idle, unless we could, at the same time, excite a keener sense of the beautiful, and a more ardent love of its divine Cause.

The perception of Beauty we have before asserted to be an affair, not of the intellectual, but of the moral attributes; and, therefore, to a purely intellectual mind, the clearest demonstration of it would be only a curious problem solved. But, if we are able so to address ourselves to those minds who feel Beauty strongly, as to enable them to connect their sensations into an harmonious system, and by assigning them, thus systematized, to a Cause worthy at once of their highest love and reverence, at once to raise the delights of Beauty to a higher dignity and greater influence on their own souls, and to show more clearly their own divine sympathies, we shall have accomplished a work which is neither mystical nor, in the common sense of the word, transcendental, whatever may be said of the train of thoughts by which we proceed. And, we believe that the assumption of the philosophers, that no human mind can determine the final cause of the impressions of Beauty, and the stigmatizing as "mystical," irrational, if not nonsensical, any attempt to define their cause, to be in itself more absurd, because it is an as-

sumption of ignorance in others based on a consciousness of ignorance in themselves. There is something sublime in assuming the possession of a knowledge greater than that of common humanity, because it recognizes progress of some kind—it is, also, humble, because it admits the possibility of being in turn surpassed; but the mind which sets a limit to the advance of the human soul is at once weak by its own confession, and arrogant, because, admitting its own feebleness, it measures all others by itself. What limit has *Deity* set to our learning His ways? If none, why should it be considered absurd or presumptuous to address ourselves to finding Him out, even to the secrets of existence? If, therefore, we have transgressed the limits of Philosophy in our speculations, and if, hereafter, we shall still further transgress, we protest against any prescriptive rule by which we shall investigate. What has been done need not be done again—but what has not, remains to be done; and, if the old ways have not reached the end, it is time others were tried. If our theory attempts to define that which has been always considered indefinable, does it follow that such attempt is absurd, rather than that the assumption that there *was* something which *could not* be defined, was ridiculous? When we say that Beauty is the visible form of Love, what is the objection urged? Either that it is false, or that it is incomprehensible. If the former, it remains to be shown, and we have lost our labor, though our readers may not have lost theirs: if the latter, we simply reply that the objection is weak—for, to us, it is not only perfectly comprehensible, but logical and inevitable. The poets, in their Delphic ecstasies, have reached and felt that truth; and when they tell us, in rapt enthusiasm, that the universe proclaims the goodness of God, that the flowers have His love inscribed on their petals, and that the winds whisper to them of eternal harmonies, we listen and admire; and we admire because what is said is true, and because its utterance touches a slumbering chord in our souls, which, from its sleep, echoes the words of the poet, and gives its oracular affirmation. The loftiest and most heavenly dream of Dante's Paradise, the most gorgeous phantasy of color that Turner ever painted, are beautiful, because

they embody the truth of some divine attribute, thus being true in a loftier sense than that of truth to the actual phenomena of Nature. We may not know it *as truth*, intellectually, but it is accepted by an instinct which reaches out of the range of the intellectual vision. Thus it is that Beauty is Truth, though the converse of this is very far from tenable—that the true is beautiful—since a vice or a deformity may be truly represented, and not be at all pleasant as matter of contemplation; but if, in any object of our regards, we discover genuine beauty, it is because in that appearance which we characterize as beautiful there is expressed something of the Divine Spirit, which is the supreme Beauty. And, whether it was in the imagery of the poet or the painter—the thought or form which entranced us with its inexplicable, mysterious significance (to explain which would be to define Poetry and Art), that meaning which we half catch, and then lose again in the effort to hold it by our reason—the flitting, elusive magic of grace, of color, or even of music, which we puzzle ourselves over perpetually, yet never can fix or interpret; that thought or form did so entrance us, because it lied in its mystery the form of some attribute of the Deity, veiled and obscured from our clear mental vision by its own glorious radiance and the feebleness of our eyes.

We have no desire to enter into the minute investigation of what those significances may be, even if it were possible—for we do not believe it to be the field of that poor reason, whose highest office is to climb after those who are led by their heaven-sent instincts, and secure the feet of the climber from falling back, to confirm truth *felt*, not to explore and discover, these being the functions of that vaguely understood, because rarely possessed, faculty—intuition. It is not in the slightest degree necessary—but rather the reverse—that any sensation of Beauty should be referred to its final cause, in order to be fully enjoyed or beneficially used; and, therefore, it does not matter in the least that we understand\* what particular attribute is the origin of any peculiar sensation of Beauty, or that we should classify and catalogue modifications of those sensations or the diversity of attributes; but it is important that, in general terms, Beauty should be

recognized as an expression of the presence of God, and reverenced as such—and thus we should comprehend that to affine ourselves to Him is to draw nearer to the source of Beauty, and to become better prepared to accept its messages. And this is the final and only desirable result of our study in this matter—to learn that the harmonies of the universe are to be received, not by intellectual investigation or activity of brain, but by pure, child-like, and unquestioning openness of heart, and a faithful and reverent desire to become perfect, even as is that Father in Heaven who is the governing and controlling Spirit of that universe; so that, having His likeness in ourselves, we may find it the more readily in all His works, and by divesting ourselves of all our own crudities and imperfections, we may purge Nature of hers, drawing thence the pure and noble Ideal; and, having plucked the beam from our own eyes, we shall well feel that the mote in hers is very small, indeed.

We are perfectly well prepared, having taken this position, to meet imputations of folly, puerility, absurdity, and the like; this was to be expected from a world whose god is Power rather than Love. But, look to the proof of the thing! Where, in all ancient Art, do we find the spirit of Beauty most gloriously working? Is it in the masterly schools where ponderous minds wrought out their grand and wonderful works—in Domenichino, in the driven hand of Rubens, in the massive Rembrandt, or even with the loftiest of the mighty, the noble and true Titian, Tintoret, and Buona-rotti? Not at all—but with the reverent and simple-hearted—with Perugino, whose motto was “fear God”—with the devout, if superstitious, painters of the Campo Santo—with the youth Raphael, yet undisturbed in his child-like faith by the world’s clamorous approbation and perishing awards—but, above all, with the feeble, praying monk of Fiesole, whose illumined soul gilded all it regarded. But let us, if we make comparisons in this matter, be true to ourselves, not insisting that we prefer the Cartoons of Raphael to the “Jardiniere,” because they are more beautiful than it, but admitting frankly that we like them better because they are more masterly, and give us higher sensations of power in the artist, rather than of perfection in the thing. The record of Painting is, if not a demonstration, a strong confirmation of the truth of our theory; and from this we will pass to those of the theorists.

We believe that in almost every theory of Beauty, something will be found which points toward our final definition of it. Even Alison, who meanders through the field with

a confusion and blind aimlessness which are astonishing in a profound metaphysician, confirms it. His theory of association in itself, strictly considered, is an absurdity, and is demonstrated to be such on almost every page of his book—passages like the following being by no means uncommon—“The common colors, for instance, of many indifferent things which surround us, of the earth, of stone, of wood, &c., have no kind of beauty, and are never mentioned as such. \* \* \* The colors, in the same manner, which distinguish the ordinary dress of the common people are never considered as beautiful. It is the colors only of the arms of the great, of the opulent, or of distinguished professions, which are ever considered in this light. \* \* \* \* The blush of the rose, the blue of a serene sky, the green of the spring, are beautiful only when they are new or unfamiliar. \* \* \* \* The valley of Vaucluse is celebrated for its beauty, yet how much of it has been owing to its being the residence of Petrarch!” The Essays on Taste scarcely deserve weighing as demonstrative of the nature of Beauty, or that any one should wade through their contradictions and misapprehensions. They proceed on a false assumption from the beginning, that an exercise of the imagination is necessary to the sensation of Beauty, and from such an error, attempting to demonstrate an error equally great, it is scarcely possible that a coherent argument could come. Yet, when Alison has finished his analysis, and casting his blind ratiocination away, comes down to his unembarrassed feeling of Beauty, he says, “The conclusion, therefore, in which I rest is, that the beauty and sublimity which are felt in the various appearances of matter are finally to be ascribed to their expression of mind, or to their being either directly or indirectly the signs of those qualities of mind which are fitted, by the constitution of our nature, to affect us with pleasing or interesting emotion.” His conclusion, strictly considered, rather than in the sense he himself would have it appear, is just, and amounts to this, that Beauty is not necessarily predicated of the forms of matter, but is “to be ascribed to its expression of mind.” But how is matter the expression of mind? If a man contrives a machine, paints a picture, builds a house, the matter in its form expresses his mind, and thus the divine work is an expression of the divine mind; and thus its beauty is owing to such expression. Why we have ascribed it to the divine Goodness alone has been partly shown, and will be more fully so when we come to treat of the Sublime; but in this also Mr. Alison also confirms us when he has settled down into still calmer senti-

\* Uncultivated people are but ordinary observers of things, and not critical in distinguishing them; but for that reason they admire more, and are more affected with what they see—and, therefore, express themselves in a warmer and more passionate manner. If the affection be well conveyed, it will work its effect without any clear idea; often without any idea at all, of the thing which has originally given rise to it.  
—Burke.

ment of Beauty. "Even upon the man of the most uncultivated taste, the scenes of Nature have some inexplicable charm: there is not a chord, perhaps, of the human heart which may not be awakened by their influence; and I believe there is no man of genuine taste who has not often felt, in the lone majesty of Nature, some unseen spirit to dwell, which, in his happier hours, touched, as if with magic hand, all the springs of his moral sensibility, and rekindled in his heart those original conceptions of the moral or intellectual excellence of his nature, which it is the melancholy tendency of the vulgar pursuits of life to diminish, if not altogether to destroy." A spirit, indeed, there is dwelling unseen in Nature—the spirit of the Omnipotent, touching every human heart, according to its purity and the openness of its relations to Nature, with a magic the mightiest and most irresistible; the declaration of a common origin, an ancestry from the Eternal, and thence a sympathy and spiritual brotherhood with all things; so that there is not a tone of color, a grace of form, or a harmony of the whole external world which does not awaken some chord in the divinely attuned soul, to bear testimony to the immortal nature of the most wonderful of associations—our correspondence with the great soul of Nature, through our likeness to God.

Burke, in his Essay on the Sublime and Beautiful, while he has not given any very delicate analysis of Beauty, or in fact made any attempt to determine its final cause, has, from approaching his subject from the direction of his *own* sensations, rather than from the point of a theory to be confirmed, given many valuable indications of the true nature of Beauty. But his essay is rather the chaining together of the suggestions coming to a severely thoughtful and tolerably observant mind, without great refinement of analytic power, and is altogether fragmentary in its nature; a few links from the middle of a chain, seemingly examined: just long enough to enable him to form an idea of the material, and then dropped; yet, connected therewith, he has given us many things irrelevant, and many things which a calm and comprehensive examination would have confuted. We can only quote his own words to describe his essay. "Men often act right from their feelings, who afterwards reason but ill on them from principle." His theory can only be fully considered when we come to treat of the relation of the Sublime to the Beautiful; but for the present we must say that his broad distinction is founded on the contrasted passions which the two excite—Beauty giving rise to Love,

and Sublimity to Fear. With regard to the former we are already agreed, and on this he says: "It is my design to consider beauty as distinguished from the sublime; and, in the course of the inquiry, to examine how far it is consistent with it. But previous to this, we must take a sort of review of the opinions already entertained of this quality; which, I think, are hardly to be reduced to any fixed principle; because men are used to talk of Beauty in a figurative manner; that is to say, in a manner extremely uncertain and indeterminate. By Beauty, I mean that quality or those qualities in bodies by which they cause love, or some passion similar to it. I confine this definition to the merely sensible qualities of things, for the sake of preserving the utmost simplicity in a subject which must always distract us, whenever we take in those various causes of sympathy which attach us to any persons or things from secondary considerations, and not from the direct force which they have merely on being viewed. I likewise distinguish love—by which I mean that satisfaction which arises to the mind upon contemplating anything beautiful, of whatsoever nature it may be—from desire or lust; which is an energy of the mind that hurries us on to the possession of certain objects, that do not not affect us as they are, beautiful, but by means altogether different. We shall have a strong desire for a woman of no remarkable beauty; while the greatest beauty in men or in other animals, though it causes love, yet excites nothing at all of desire. Which shows that beauty and the passion caused by beauty, which I call love, is different from desire, though desire may sometimes operate along with it."

If, when Burke had determined this theory in his mind, he had gone further, and studied out the nature of love, he would have performed another step in the direction of our theory; and, indeed, he almost accomplished this when he said, in treating of the application of the idea of beauty to qualities of mind, that "those virtues which cause admiration, and all of the sublimer kind, produce terror rather than love; such as fortitude, justice, wisdom, and the like. Never was any man amiable by force of those qualities. Those which engage our hearts, which impress us with a sense of loveliness, are the softer virtues; easiness of temper, compassion, kindness, and liberality." These constitute what in general we term goodness, and thus our philosopher, as far as he goes, confirms us in our position. But the goodness of which he treats is only a human goodness, considered without reference to

its source, and he is only able by vague analogies to form a connection with the beauty of the inanimate. But if Beauty is a positive quality, it is always essentially the same, and due to the same cause; and were it not for the poor estimation in which analogical demonstration is held, we should readily arrive at conclusions at least proximately correct in the matter. It is true that in the sphere of accidents and chance we may fancy analogies when they are only such to the external vision—mere fortuitous resemblances—but a genuine analogy in the Divine works, that is, one residing in the inner nature of the things analogical, must bear positive testimony to a sameness of origin or cause, and we have no other ground from which to study God and his attributes than ourselves and our attributes, and this we do by the analogy (which, when complete and exact in all directions, we call a likeness), between ourselves and Him. Our goodness is the result of His goodness, and if our beauty is only the manifestation of our goodness, His beauty must have the same cause; and since, apart from ourselves, the only form in which we see God is in the visible universe, He must show himself there as good, and thence as beautiful. The examination of other theorists who have approached more nearly to what we consider the truth, must be deferred to another chapter.

#### LAKE MICHIGAN.

Slow heaves thy sullen waves,  
 Laden with crushing ice, vast Michigan!  
 Weighed down, and half-forgotten by the sun,  
 They die in hollow caves.

No wild-fowl swinging, dreams  
 Upon thy bosom, or descends to hide;  
 Leaving her magic circles fading wide—  
 No sunny white sail gleams.

Like steam, up from thy breast  
 Thy fore mist rises, desolate and grey;  
 And where the bright sky kissed thee far away,  
 Dull, blotting clouds do rest.

Upon thy pebbly beach,  
 O'er which the laughing summer waters leaped,  
 Hugo jagged frozen battlements are heaped,  
 Far as the eye can reach,

Grown'd with dull blacken'd snow,  
 And broken fragments, like a crumbling fort;  
 Thy mighty waves have lost them, as in sport,  
 Then sank to moan below.

Stormy, or calm, or gay,  
 How much like life, this life of ours, thou art!  
 So cold caution chills the frustate heart,  
 And checks its sparkling play.

O, ere the wintry time,  
 Steals, frost-like, o'er my youthful eye and breast  
 Dimming sweet Nature's beauties—let me rest,  
 And wake in Heaven's clime!

FINALE.